

Vietnam: UN committee review unmasks grave violations of women's rights

PARIS, 29 July 2015 (FIDH & VCHR) - UN committee experts expressed serious concern over persisting gender inequality and the widespread abuse of women's rights in Vietnam at the conclusion of their review of the country's implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva on 9-10 July.

“Vietnam has made extensive legal commitments to guarantee women's rights on paper but has taken no steps to enforce or protect them in practice. Thirty-three years after Vietnam's ratification of CEDAW, Vietnamese women and girls are still relegated to the status of second class human beings,” said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

In [its concluding observations](#) released on 27 July, the CEDAW committee criticized Vietnam for the failure of its policy-makers and government officials to grasp the “concept of substantive gender equality.” The committee expressed concern over the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women in the family and in society. It noted that discriminatory gender bias and stereotypes were perpetuated in educational materials and in the media. The strong preference for male offspring had resulted in the sex selection of fetuses and an imbalance of the sex ratio at birth, the committee added.

The committee voiced its concern over the “high prevalence” of violence against women and girls and recommended Vietnam amend its legislation with a clear resolve to criminalize all forms of violence against women, including marital rape and sexual harassment.

The committee was also concerned over allegations of harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, and ill-treatment of women human rights defenders. In this regard, the committee urged the authorities to carry out investigations, prosecute those responsible, and provide remedies to the victims of such violations. It also recommended Vietnam take specific steps to create an enabling environment in which women human rights defenders and women's rights organizations can be freely established and operate.

Throughout the review, the Vietnamese government delegation frequently responded to the questions posed by the committee experts in vague, evasive, and even contradictory ways. Several experts of the CEDAW committee expressed grave concerns about the recent escalation of police violence against women human rights

defenders, and asked for a list of women human rights defenders in prison. Their statements were met by the Vietnamese government delegation's blanket denials that no women had ever been assaulted or detained because of their human rights activities.

Many issues raised by the 23-member UN committee in its concluding observations echoed the concerns expressed by FIDH and the Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR) in their [joint submission presented to CEDAW in June 2015](#) ahead of Vietnam's review.

The joint submission described gender-discriminating laws and mechanisms such as the 'ho khau' or household registration permit, as well as discrimination with regard to access to healthcare, education, and the enjoyment of land rights. Such discrimination is exacerbated for female members of ethnic minorities. The submission also detailed serious abuses, such as trafficking of women and girls for sexual and labor exploitation, abuses of female worker rights, domestic violence, and violations of reproductive rights, and made 25 specific recommendations to the Vietnamese government to improve the situation of women's rights.



VCHR President Vo Van Ai and VCHR Vice-President Penelope Faulkner brief the UN CEDAW experts

“Vietnamese officials claim that its shortcomings in implementing CEDAW are due to the lack of financial resources. The CEDAW Committee said they are due to Vietnam’s lack of political will. But most of all, it is the one-party state with its lack of transparency, political freedoms, and the pervasive control of the Communist Party that impedes the realization of women’s rights in Vietnam,” said VCHR President Vo Van Ai.

Although the CEDAW's concluding observations were made public on 27 July,

immediately after the review, on 10 July, Vietnam's state-run press deceptively announced that the CEDAW committee had "approved" Vietnam's periodic report on the national implementation of the convention.

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